



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 16 – 22 March 2015



19 March 1910 Orville Wright opened the **first Wright Flying School** at Montgomery, Alabama. This site became **Maxwell Air Force Base**.

21 March 1912 Lt. Frank P. Lahm flew a Wright Model B aircraft, at Fort William McKinley in the Philippines—the **first flight of a military airplane at an overseas base**.

21 March 1916 The French authorized formation of the *Escadrille Americaine*, later known as the **Lafayette Escadrille**. Composed of U.S. pilots, many of whom later served in U.S. air units, this unit was formed on 20 Apr 1916 and trained Americans in aerial combat.



22 March 1941 The Air Corps announced the formation of its **first black air combat unit**, the 99th Pursuit Squadron. The unit was to include 47 officers and 429 enlisted men. Ground crews trained at Chanute Field, Illinois, while pilots trained at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. (Photo of 99th PS aviators at left from *The World War II Multimedia Database* [website](http://www.worldwar2database.com).)

21 March 1943 Cornelia Fort, one of the most accomplished pilots of the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron, became the **first American female pilot to die on active duty**. A plane being ferried by a male pilot struck her aircraft in a mid-air collision over Texas.

Cornelia Fort (right) earned her pilot's license in Hawaii and was a civilian instructor pilot flying with a student on the morning of December 7, 1941. Her aircraft nearly collided with a Japanese aircraft leaving Pearl Harbor, making her one of the few airborne eyewitnesses to the attack. Fort was the second woman to volunteer for the [Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron](http://www.wafs.org) (WAFS) whose members ferried aircraft to points of embarkation and towed targets for training exercises.



19 March 1944 **Operation STRANGLE began**. Allied progress north through Italy was halted by German defenses at the "Gustav Line." The Allies tried an amphibious landing behind these defenses at Anzio, but this attack was contained. The Mediterranean Allied Air Forces (MAAF) drafted a plan to attack all enemy rail routes and starve the German army of supplies. Operation STRANGLE differed from earlier air campaigns as the MAAF simultaneously targeted the entire transport system – bridges, yards, tunnels, and open stretches of track (below). German transport capacity was reduced from 80,000 to 4,000 tons per day delivered to the front.



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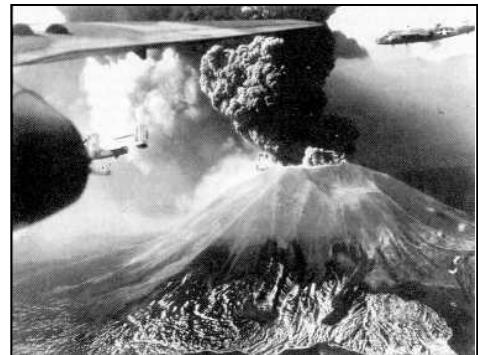
However, Allied ground forces still made no progress, and the static battlefield permitted the



Germans to maintain their forces in central Italy by strict rationing, foraging for food, and moving supplies and reinforcements at night.

When rested and refitted Allied armies renewed their attacks on 12 May, they were supported by Allied air forces striking the enemy's front and rear areas. Allied ground forces finally breached the Gustav Line and forced the Germans to retreat. On 4 June, American patrols entered Rome.

20 March 1944 As the Operation STRANGLE campaign began against German forces in Italy, **Mount Vesuvius erupted and buried the Pompeii airdrome**, the base of the 340th Bomb Group. Lava cinders destroyed or damaged some 88 B-25s in one of the worst single losses of U.S. aircraft in the war. Photo at right.



18 March 1945 About 1,250 American bombers escorted by 670 fighters dropped 3,000 tons of bombs on Berlin. In numbers of bombers, this daylight mission was the **largest air attack of the war**.

21 March 1946 **Major Air Commands established.** Tactical Air Command was activated to support ground forces, Continental Air Forces was redesignated Strategic Air Command and given the atomic strike mission, and Air Defense Command was established to defend the U.S.

17 March 1961 Northrop delivered the **first T-38 Talon jet trainer** to Air Training Command at Randolph AFB, Texas. Since then, more than 72,000 USAF pilots have trained on the T-38. The USAF remains one of the few armed forces using dedicated supersonic final trainers. Upgrades and modifications should extend the T-38 service life to 2020.



17 March 1981 McDonnell-Douglas delivered the **first KC-10A Extender** tanker/cargo aircraft to Strategic Air Command.

Substantially larger than the KC-135, the KC-10 could carry more fuel and cargo and could refuel more types of aircraft, including other KC-10s. Photo of KC-10 at right.





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19 March 2003 **Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.** Coalition air forces flew some 1,700 sorties and launched over 500 cruise missiles, quickly dominating Iraqi airspace. The strikes softened the Iraqi Republican Guards in preparation for advancing coalition invasion forces that seized Baghdad on 5 April. At right, strikes on Baath party headquarters and other targets in Baghdad.



20 March 2006 The **first operational CV-22 Osprey** was delivered to the 58th Special Operations Wing (58th SOW) at Kirtland AFB, New Mexico. This and subsequent aircraft became part of the 58th SOW's fleet of aircraft used for training CV-22 aircrews.

The V-22 is a tilt-rotor vertical/short takeoff and landing (VSTOL), multi-mission aircraft



developed to fill multi-Service requirements. The USAF variant, the CV-22, was to replace MH-53J and MH-60G helicopters and augment the MC-130 fleet for long-range insertion and extraction missions. The tilt-rotor design has the vertical flight capabilities of a helicopter, the speed and range of a turboprop aircraft, and is capable of aerial refueling and world-wide self-deployment. At left, a CV-22 Osprey flies above an MH-53 Pave Low helicopter.

20 March 2011 **A C-17 landing in Sendai, Japan** delivered the first humanitarian relief supplies after the earthquake and tsunami of 11 March. At right, members of the 730th Air Mobility Squadron load pallets of water, food and blankets onto a C-17 Globemaster III aircraft at Yokota AB, Japan. By 23 March 2011, the U.S. Air Force had flown more than 230 missions and transported more than 3.2 million pounds of supplies and equipment in support of **Operation TOMODACHI**.



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